

TOWN/COMMERCIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2008

CLARIFICATION OF OUR CHARGE

The Town/Commercial Relations Committee (TCRC) has the following charge and approach to its responsibilities:

- We advise the Select Board and Town Manager on issues affecting commerce in Amherst and the business community.
- We provide a business perspective on changes to parking regulations and the assessment of parking needs in the Town.
- We act as a conduit for suggestions, comments and complaints for the Town's current business community.
- We perceive ourselves as a think tank, considering "big ideas" and futuristic possibilities for Amherst and responding to the needs of Town Meeting and Select Board for this thinking, but also lead the way.
- We are pro-business development because such development is an essential tool for protecting and enhancing the nature of Amherst. We want sustainable, smart growth, not growth for growth's sake; we are looking for businesses with a good fit to existing businesses, not superstores.

The TCRC needs to operate at full strength, so there is a need to fill vacancies in a timely fashion with qualified, representative people in the right mix of business and at large members. The TCRC has gone for long periods with too few members, and this affects our ability to meet and effectively carry out our charge.

The Select Board needs to seriously consider recommendations and policy proposals brought forward by the TCRC, as we are one of the few citizen boards in town directly addressing the local economy and advocating for the business community.

The TCRC has not recently been consulted on matters relating to Parking. We suggest that either the Select Board refer parking matters to us or amend our charge to remove the responsibility and reduce the number of members on the Committee accordingly.

DISCUSSIONS ENGAGED IN AND ACTIONS TAKEN

- Permitting process –
 - Met with the Zoning Board of Appeals
 - Urged a streamlining of the process to eliminate or greatly reduce the image of a Business un-friendly environment.
 - Urged the change of current practice of having Special Permits expire on Change of Ownership
 - Urged a change to review process on existing Special permits to narrow the focus of review and not engage in a comprehensive detail review every time a permit is modified
 - Met with the Zoning Sub Committee of the Planning Board
 - Helped to develop and supported rezoning articles for

- Professional Research Park – Permitting technical/professional offices
 - University Drive Limited Business (B-L) District – Allowing R&D uses by right through an R&D overlay district
 - College Street – Expanding the Village Center Business (B-VC) District
 - Spring Street – Expanding the General Business (B-G) District
 - Sunderland Road – Rezoning two properties to Village Center Residence (R-VC)
- 2008 Annual Town Meeting
 - Supported the above rezoning articles
- Master Plan
 - TCRC members participated in *Planning Amherst Together* work groups on economic development and other master plan elements.

POSITIONS OR INITIATIVES THAT THE TCRC ENDORSES

Zoning

1. There is limited available land remaining for business development in the Town and as a result real consideration should be given to rezoning remaining parcels for commercial/business uses.
2. Too often in the past the opinions of a few outspoken people have outweighed the benefit of zone changes to the Town as a whole.
3. We are sensitive to the needs of abutters regarding traffic problems, sidewalks and other infrastructure issues; however the use of “contract zoning” to extract up-front concessions from potential developers should be minimized, if used at all. Our economic viability and business growth will only be corrected with a “Long Term” vision rather than the short-sighted limitations that contract zoning seeks to impose.
4. The TCRC has started to attend and audit the meetings of Amherst’s permitting boards and committees to determine if the review process, questioning and conditions placed on commercial permit applications is efficient, fair and balanced.

Respectfully submitted

Town Commercial Relations Committee
 Mark L. Parent
 Chair